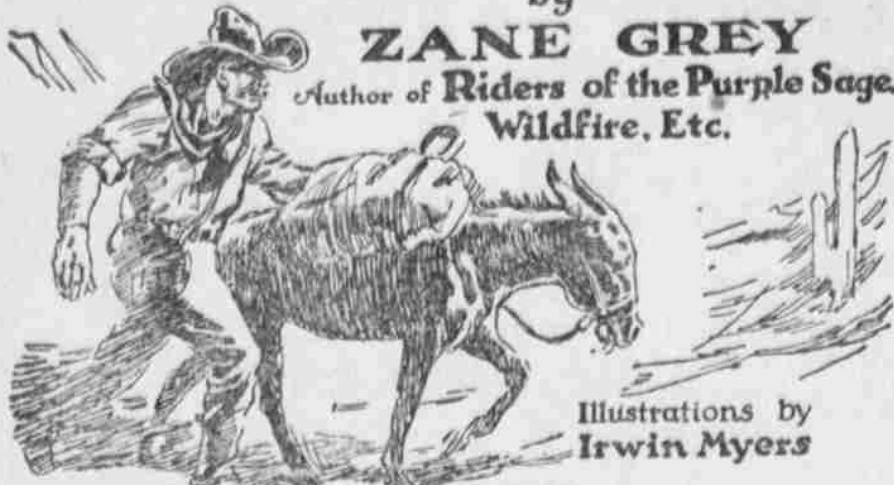


# DESERT GOLD

by  
**ZANE GREY**  
Author of *Riders of the Purple Sage*,  
*Wildfire*, Etc.



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CHAPTER SIX CONTINUED

The Mexicans were leisurely cooking their morning meal. A slow wrath stirred in Gale as he watched the. They showed not the slightest indication of breaking camp. One fellow, evidently the leader, packed a gun at his hip, the only weapon in sight. Gale noted this with speculative eyes.

Then he saw two Indians on burros come riding up the other side of the knoll upon which the adobe house stood; and apparently they were not aware of the presence of the Mexicans, for they came on up the path.

One Indian was a Papago. The other, striking in appearance for other reasons than that he seemed to be about to fall from the burro, Gale took to be a Yaqui. They came over the knoll and down the path toward the well.

turned a corner of the house, and completely surprised the raiders.

Gale heard a short, shrill cry, strangely high and wild, and this came from one of the Indians. It was answered by hoarse shouts. Then the leader of the trio, the Mexican who packed a gun, pulled it and fired point-blank. He missed once—and again.

At the third shot the Papago shrieked and tumbled off his burro to fall in a heap. The other Indian swayed, as if the taking away of the support lent by his comrade had brought collapse, and with the fourth shot he, too, slipped to the ground.

The reports had frightened the horses in the corral; and a vicious black, crowding the rickety bars, broke them down. He came plunging out. With a splendid vaulting mount, the Mexican with the gun leaped to the back of the horse. He yelled and waved his gun, and urged the black forward. The manner of all three was savagely jocular. They were having sport. The two on the ground began to dance and jabber. The mounted leader shot again, and then stuck like a leech upon the bare back of the rearing black. It was a vain show of horsemanship. Then this Mexican, by some strange grip, brought the horse down, plunging almost upon the body of the Indian that had fallen last.

Gale stood aghast with his rifle clutched tight. He could not divine the intention of the raider, but suspected something strikingly brutal. The horse answered to that cruel,

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The fallen raider sat up, mumbling to his pants in one breath, cursing in his next.

"Go, Greasers! Run!" yelled Gale. Then he yelled it in Spanish. At the point of his rifle he drove the two raiders out of the camp. His next move was to run into the house and fetch out the carbines. With a heavy stone he dismantled each weapon.

That done, he set out on a run for his horse. Blanco Sol heard him coming and whistled a welcome, and when Gale ran up the horse was snorting war, mounting, Gale rode rapidly back to the scene of the action, and his first thought, when he arrived at the well, was to give Sol a drink and to fill his canteen.

Then Gale led his horse up out of the waterhole, and decided before remounting to have a look at the Indians. The Papago had been shot through the heart, but the Yaqui was still alive. Moreover, he was conscious and staring up at Gale with great, strange, somber eyes, black as volcanic slag.

"Gringo good—no kill," he said, in husky whisper.

His speech was not affirmative so much as questioning.

"Yaqui, you're done for," said Gale, and his words were positive. He was simply speaking aloud his mind.

"Yaqui—no hurt—much," replied the Indian, and then he spoke a strange word—repeated it again and again.

An instinct of Gale's, or perhaps some suggestion in the husky, thick whisper or dark face, told Gale to reach for his canteen. He lifted the Indian and gave him a drink, and if ever in all his life he saw gratitude in human eyes he saw it then. Then he examined the injured Yaqui. The Indian had three wounds—a bullet hole in his shoulder, a crushed arm, and a badly lacerated leg.

The ranger thought rapidly. This Yaqui would live unless left there to die or be murdered by the Mexicans when they found courage to sneak back to the well. It never occurred to Gale to abandon the poor fellow. All the same, he knew he multiplied his perils a hundredfold by burdening himself with a crippled Indian. Swiftly he set to work, and with rifle over under his hand, and shifting glance spared from his task, he bound up the Yaqui's wounds. At the same time he kept keen watch.

The Indians' burros and the horses of the raiders were all out of sight. Time was too valuable for Gale to use any in what might be vain search. Therefore, he lifted the Yaqui upon Sol's broad shoulders and climbed into the saddle. At a word Sol dropped his head and started eastward up the trail, walking swiftly, without resentment for his double burden.

Gale, bearing in mind the ever-present possibility of encountering more raiders and of being pursued, saved the strength of the horse. Once out of sight of Papago well, Gale dismounted and walked beside the horse, steadying with one firm hand the helpless, dangling Yaqui.

Gale kept pace with his horse. He bore the twinge of pain that darted through his injured hip at every stride. In the heat of midday he halted in the shade of a rock, and lifting the Yaqui down, gave him a drink. Then, after a long, sweeping survey of the surrounding desert, he removed Sol's saddle and let him roll, and took for himself a welcome rest and a bite to eat.

The Yaqui was tenacious of life. He was still holding his own. For the first time Gale really looked at the Indian to study him. He had a large head nobly cast, and a face that resembled a shrunken mask. It seemed chiseled in the dark-eyed, volcanic lava of his Sonora wilderness. The Indian's eyes were always black and mystic, but this Yaqui's encompassed all the tragic desolation of the desert. They were fixed on Gale, moved only when he moved.

Gale resumed his homeward journey. He held grimly by the side of the tireless, implacable horse, holding the Yaqui on the saddle, taking the brunt of the merciless thorns. In the end it became heartrending. His heavy chaps dragged him down; but he dared not go on without them, for, thick and stiff as they were, the terrible, steel-bayoneted spikes of the choyas pierced through to sting his legs.

To the last mile Gale held to Blanco Sol's gait and kept ever-watchful gaze ahead on the trail. Then, with the low, flat houses of Forlorn River shining red in the sunset, Gale flagged and rapidly weakened. The Yaqui slipped out of the saddle and dropped limp in the sand. Gale could not mount his horse. He clutched Sol's long tail and twisted his hand in it and stag-

gered on.

Blanco Sol whistled a piercing blast. He scented cool water and sweet alfalfa hay. Twinkling lights ahead meant rest. The melancholy desert twilight rapidly succeeded the sunset. It accentuated the forlorn loneliness of the gray, winding river of sand and its gray shores. Night shadows trooped down from the black and looming mountains.

CHAPTER VII  
White Horses.

"A crippled Yaqui! Why the hell did you saddle yourself with him?" roared Belding, as he laid Gale upon the bed. Belding had grown hard these late, violent weeks.

"Because I chose," whispered Gale, in reply. "Go after him—he dropped in the trail—across the river—near the first big saguaro."

"Sure, Dick, sure," Belding replied, in softer tones. Then he stalked out; his heels rang on the flagstones; he opened a door and called: "Mother—girls, here's Dick back. He's done up. . . . Do what you can to make him comfortable. I've got a little job on hand."

Gale slept twenty hours. Then he awoke, thirsty, hungry, lame, overworn, and presently went in search of Belding and the business of the day.

"Your Yaqui was near dead, but guess we'll pull him through," said Belding.

Gale told of his experience at Papago well.

"That raider who tried to grind the Yaqui under a horse's hoofs—he was a hyena!" concluded Gale, shuddering. "I've seen some blood spilled and some hard sights, but that inhuman devil took my nerve. Why, as I told you, Belding, I missed a shot at him—not twenty paces!"

"Dick, in cases like that the sooner you clean up the bunch the better," said Belding, grimly. "As for hard sights—wait till you've seen a Yaqui do up a Mexican. Bar none, that is the limit! Dick, if I'm not mistaken, this fellow was a chief. It was a waste of strength, a needless risk for you to save him, pack him back here. But, damn the whole Greaser outfit generally, I'm glad you did it!"

Gale remembered then to speak of his concern for Ladd.

"Laddy didn't go out to meet you," replied Belding. "I knew you were due in any day, and, as there's been trouble between here and Casita, I sent him that way. Since you've been out our friend Carter lost a bunch of horses and a few steers. Did you get a good look at the horses those raiders had at Papago well?"

Dick had learned, since he had become a ranger, to see everything with keen, sure, photographic eye; and, being put to the test so often required of him, he described the horses as a dark-colored drove, mostly bays and blacks, with one spotted sorrel.

"Some of Carter's—sure as you're born!" exclaimed Belding.

"Well, what shall I do now?" asked Dick.

"Stay here and rest," bluntly replied Belding. "You need it. Let the women fuss over you—doctor you a little. When Jim gets back from Sonoyta I'll know more about what we ought to do."

Gale had received several letters from his sister Elsie, the last of which he had not answered. There had not been much opportunity for writing on his infrequent returns to Forlorn River; and, besides, Elsie had written that her father had stormed over what he considered Dick's falling into wild and evil ways.

"Time flies," said Dick. "George Thorne will be free before long, and he'll be coming out. I wonder if he'll stay here or try to take Mercedes away?"

"Well, he'll stay right here in Forlorn River, if I have any say," replied Belding. "I'd like to know how he'd ever get that Spanish girl out of the country now, with all the trails overrun by rebels and raiders. It'd be hard to disguise her. Say, Dick, maybe we can get Thorne to stay here. You know, since you've discovered the possibility of a big water supply, I've had dreams of a future for Forlorn River. . . . If only this war was over!"

The discovery that Belding alluded to was one that might very well lead to the making of a wonderful and agricultural district of Altar valley. While in college Dick Gale had studied engineering, but he had not set the scientific world afire with his brilliance. Nevertheless, his smattering of engineering skill bore fruit in the last place on earth where anything might have been expected of it—in the desert. Gale had always wondered about the source of Forlorn River. He had discovered a long, narrow, rock-bottomed and rock-walled gulch that could be dammed at the lower end by the dynamiting of leaning cliffs above. An inexhaustible supply of water could be stored there. Furthermore, he had worked out an irrigation plan to bring the water down for mining uses, and to make a paradise out of that part of Altar valley which lay in the United States. Belding claimed there was gold in the arroyos, gold in the gulches, not in quantities to make a prospector rejoice, but enough to work for. And the soil on the higher levels of Altar valley needed only water to make it grow anything the year round. Gale, too, had come to have dreams of a future for Forlorn River.

On the afternoon of the following day Ladd unexpectedly appeared leading a lame and lathered horse into the yard. The legs of the horse were raw

and red, and he seemed about to drop. Ladd's sombrero was missing, he wore a bloody scarf round his head; sweat and blood and dust had formed a crust on his face; little streams of powdery dust slid from him; and the lower half of his scarred chaps were full of broken white thorns.

"Howdy, boys," he drawled. "I shore am glad to see you all."

"Laddy, go in the house to the women," said Belding. "I'll tend to your horse."

"Shore, Tom, in a minute. I've been down the road. An' I found hoss tracks and steer tracks goin' across the line. But I seen no sign of raiders till this mornin'. Slept at Carter's last night. That raid the other day cleaned him out. He's shootin' mad. Well, this mornin' I rode plumb into a bunch of Carter's hosses, runnin' wild for home. Some Greasers were tryin' to head them round an' chase them back across the line. I rode in between an' made matters embarrassin'. Carter's hosses got away. Then me an' the Greasers had a little game

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**NOTICE OF TAKING UP ESTRAY**  
Taken up by undersigned Block 33 and 34, Neville addition, County of Lincoln, State of Nebraska; on the 19 day of November 1922, 1 black gelding, 2 years old; 1 dun colored gelding coming 2 years old; 1 gray mare coming 4 yrs. old. Unbroke and no brands. Dated this 22 day of November 1922. Signed Gene Crook.

**EXTENSION ROAD NO. 37**  
To whom it may concern:

A consent petition presented to the board of county commissioners to locate a road commencing at the Southwest corner of Section nine (9) and the Southeast corner of Section eight (8) Town Thirteen (13) Range Thirty four (34) to connect with road No. 213. All objections thereto or claims for damage must be filed in the County Clerk's office on or before noon on the 2nd day of January, A. D. 1923 or such road will be established without reference thereto.

Said road to be 66 feet wide.  
A. S. ALLEN  
County Clerk

**EXTENSION ROAD NO. 247**  
To whom it may concern:

A consent petition presented to the board of county commissioners to locate a road commencing at the Southwest corner of Section 27, Township 14, North of Range 31 west of the 6th P. M. and running thence North on section line to the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way. All objections thereto or claims for damage must be filed in the County Clerk's office on or before noon of the 2nd day of January A. D. 1923 or such road will be established without reference thereto.

Said road to be 66 feet wide.  
A. S. ALLEN  
County Clerk

**NOTICE OF PAVING ASSESSMENT**  
Notice is hereby given that the City Council of the city of North Platte, Nebraska, will sit as a Board of Equalization on January 2nd, 1923 at 8 p. m., for the purpose of equalizing and assessing the cost of construction of pavement in Paving District No. 9, being West 4th Street and in Paving District No. 11, being West 9th Street, against the abutting property owners.

All those having objections to such equalization and assessment will be present at the council chamber on said date for the purpose of presenting to the council all objections.

Witness my hand this 19th day of December, 1922.

O. E. ELDER,  
City Clerk.

**VACATION OF ROADS NO. 120 & 161**  
To whom it may concern:

The commissioner appointed to vacate roads Number 120 and 161. Road No. 120 commencing on the section line between sections 8 and 9 Town 14, Range 33, thence in a Northeast-easterly direction, parallel with the south bank of the North Platte river, and terminating on the section line between sections 9 and 10 Town 14 Range 33.

And road No. 161, commencing on section line between Sections 9 and 10, Town 14, Range 33, thence running in a Southeasterly direction to the section line between sections 10 and 11 in Town 14, Range 33, West was reported in favor of the vacation thereof, and all objections thereto must be filed in the county clerk's office on or before noon on the 2nd day of January, 1923 or such roads will be vacated without reference thereto.

A. S. ALLEN  
County Clerk

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**NOTICE OF PETITION**  
Estate No. 1920 of Hattie M. Reckard, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska. To all persons interested in said Estate take notice that a petition has been filed for the probating of the will filed and the appointment of E. H. Evans as executor of said estate, which has been set for hearing herein on January 2, 1923 at 10 o'clock a. m.

Office Phone 70 Res. Phone 1242